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Johnny Appleseed: the man  
behind the myth

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# Johnny Appleseed: The Man Behind The Myth

by

Steven Fortriede



## ABOUT THE COVERS

THE FRONT COVER shows the stone erected in 1935 by the Fort Wayne Optimist Club over the supposed gravesite of John Chapman in the Archer Cemetery.

THE BACK COVER shows the stone erected by Wesley S. Roebuck over the supposed gravesite of John Chapman on the Roebuck farm.

# Johnny Appleseed: The Man Behind The Myth

by

Steven Fortriede

Fort Wayne Public Library  
1978

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## CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
I. Early Years .....	1
II. The Ohio Frontier .....	7
III. The Swedenborgian Missionary .....	11
IV. Myths in the Making .....	15
V. Westward to Indiana .....	19
VI. Death and Burial .....	22
Notes and References .....	30
Appendix .....	37



## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author recognizes his debt to Dr. Robert Price, whose many years of careful research and study, published in Johnny Appleseed, Man and Myth (Indiana University Press, 1954) guided and aided the preparation of this pamphlet.



## FOREWORD

John Chapman was one of America's authentic pioneer heroes, a contemporary of men such as Daniel Boone and Davy Crockett. He planted his first apple seeds as a boy about the time Washington was elected President and his last as an old man about the time Lincoln was elected to Congress. He moved into Ohio before Secretary of State James Monroe bought Louisiana from the French. By the time he died in Indiana in 1845, Texas had been annexed, the frontier had pushed across the Mississippi, and, out in California, Captain John Sutter had built his fort and was looking around for a likely location for a sawmill.

Yet, most people know less fact and more myth about John Chapman than about any other character in American history. Some think he was only a story or a folk tale; the rest, if they know him at all, know him as Johnny Appleseed.

This pamphlet presents some of the facts about John Chapman. It is primarily based on Robert Price's book, Johnny Appleseed, Man and Myth, published in 1954. In this pamphlet we will examine some of the myths and stories which sprang up around this frontiersman. We will try to trace the stories back to their sources to show where they originated, how they developed into myths, and how they have been perpetuated as "facts" in the Johnny Appleseed story. Some of these stories are very old. Many of them were first told around the hearths and campfires of the earliest settlers of Ohio, even while Johnny was still alive. By the time they came to be written down, the memories of the original storytellers had become a bit hazy, and their imaginations had begun to fill in the missing details.



## I. EARLY YEARS

The storytellers, generally have Johnny born somewhere in Massachusetts, Connecticut, or Pennsylvania. More than a dozen places claim his birth; in 1768, or 1774, or 1775, or 1787, but almost always in the spring of the year. Every storyteller, trying to find some portent of the new baby's future fame, mentions the beautiful apple blossoms which garlanded his birth. In some versions the wind blows the boughs against the window of the nursery; sometimes the baby John reaches for the branches outside the window, and sometimes the blossoms are a bouquet picked by a loving husband to grace the bedside of a beloved wife. Always there are apple blossoms.

John Chapman was actually born in Leominster, Massachusetts on September 26, 1774.<sup>1</sup> There wasn't an apple blossom in sight. His father, Nathaniel Chapman, was a farmer and carpenter, but he was apparently no great success at either trade. The Chapmans lived in a small rented house in Leominster. The house has long since disappeared, although the site was marked in 1940 by the Leominster Bicentennial Committee.<sup>2</sup> Soon after the birth of the baby John, Nathaniel Chapman enlisted in the Continental Army. He was one of the original Minutemen, fought at Bunker Hill, suffered through the winter at Valley

Forge, and was eventually discharged from the service because of some question regarding mismanagement of military stores entrusted to his care.<sup>3</sup>

John's mother was Elizabeth Simonds, also of Leominster, a frail woman whose soldier husband left her to manage the household and care for the infant John and his older sister, also named Elizabeth. Elizabeth Chapman, the mother, died July 18, 1776, shortly after delivering her third child, a boy named Nathaniel who also died within a few weeks.<sup>4</sup>

We do not know what happened to the two young Chapman children, Elizabeth only six and John not yet two, but they probably stayed with relatives in the area. Both the Chapman and Simonds families had long been established in Leominster, and there were many aunts and cousins nearby.

In July 1780, Nathaniel was married again, this time to Lucy Cooley of Longmeadow,<sup>5</sup> where he took up residence. In the next twenty-two years, ten children were born to Nathaniel and Lucy.<sup>6</sup> The little frame house, already old in 1780 but still standing in 1950, rapidly grew so crowded that the oldest boy might well have been encouraged to leave home as soon as he could make his way in the world.

Indeed, the details of young John's life up until 1797 are completely lost, except to the imaginations of the storytellers. Perhaps the most persistent story from this period is that John attended Harvard College, graduating with honors, according to some sources.

This myth apparently had its origin in a purely fictional novel entitled The Quest of John Chapman, published in 1904. This story makes John's father a Massachusetts cleric and John himself a ministerial student at Harvard. The Harvard story was retold and some quite serious biographers, perhaps trying to account for Johnny's remarkable intelligence and

understanding of religious doctrines, seized on it and perpetuated it as fact. The fact is that a considerable amount of searching over the years has failed to turn up any record of Johnny as a student at Harvard.<sup>7</sup>

The Quest of John Chapman also provides an example of another recurring theme in the Johnny Appleseed myth, the lost love. Even the earliest of the written recollections, some set down only ten or fifteen years after his death, contain vague allusions to an unhappy love affair. None of these can be documented. It may be that the real source for the stories is the desire of the storytellers to account for the eccentricities of a strange old bachelor. In any case, the form of the story which is most widely told is exemplified in The Quest: Johnny loves one Dorothy Durand, but their two families are bitter enemies--a difference of theological opinions--and the lovers are separated. The Durands move west and Johnny sets out to search for his beloved. He finally locates the family only to learn that Dorothy has died shortly before of a broken heart. Other authors follow the same sequence of events, but change the name of the girl. Henry Pershing, in his purported biography of Chapman titled Johnny Appleseed and His Time, published in 1930, called her Sarah Crawford and had her reunited with Johnny but dying on their wedding day. These stories all close by asserting that, many years later, Johnny returned to plant apple blossoms over the grave.

The detailed record of John Chapman's activities as a young man is yet to be discovered, but the general trend of his young life can be inferred. Sometime before 1797 Johnny learned to read and write very well. He learned something about the culture and propagation of fruit trees. He learned how to take care of himself in the wilderness of the frontier.

He embraced the religious doctrines of Emanuel Swedenborg.

Some early stories say that Johnny was apprenticed to an orchardist or that he spent several years around 1790 working as a Swedenborgian missionary along the Potomac River. These tales may have some basis in fact, but Henry Pershing's story that John was certified a minister at the Conference of the Swedenborgian Church in Boston in 1786 is pure bunk. The first General Convention of the New Jerusalem in the United States of America was not held until May, 1817,<sup>8</sup> by which time John was a widely known and respected Swedenborgian. In 1786 he would have been twelve years old, too young for even the most precocious missionarying.

Many stories relate different versions of John's beginnings as an itinerant nurseryman, but the earliest reasonably reliable account brings John on stage in the middle of a freak snowstorm somewhere in the wild western wilderness of Pennsylvania in October 1797, on his way to the new town of Warren which then consisted of a single log building. This account was written in 1853 by Judge Lansing Wetmore.<sup>9</sup> It is apparently not based on first-hand evidence, as Judge Wetmore did not come into the area until 1815, but the judge did draw on the memories of the earlier residents and he himself saw the remains of one of Johnny's early nurseries. Wetmore, who was interested in recording many aspects of the early history of the Warren area, seems to have kept closely to the verifiable truth. Further evidence that Judge Wetmore was honestly recording local history and not merely seeking to appropriate some of the glory of the Appleseed legend, as did so many later writers, is that he never once used the name "Johnny Appleseed." Either he had never heard of the nickname or he never connected it with the John Chapman

who planted apples in Warren.

The only hard; that is documentary, evidence which might confirm Johnny's presence in the Warren, Pennsylvania area is the ledger of a nearby trading post which shows several entries for a John Chapman around the year 1798.<sup>10</sup> There is, however, no definite proof that this was the same John Chapman who became known as Johnny Appleseed.

Johnny did not stay long in the Warren area. Judge Wetmore's narrative concludes, "The demand for fruit trees being limited, and unable to obtain a livelihood by his favorite pursuit, he went to Franklin where he established another nursery."

It is at Franklin about 1800 that historians are first able to document and chronicle the activities of John Chapman. His name appears several times in trading post ledgers. He shows up in the 1800 census of Venago County, actually completed in April, 1801, living alone in Irwin Township a few miles southwest of Franklin.<sup>11</sup> In 1804, at Franklin, John signed two IOU's, each for one hundred dollars; one in favor of the children of Elizabeth Rudd, his sister; and the other in favor of "Nathaniel Chapman" although it is not clear whether the Nathaniel referred to was John's father or his half-brother also called Nathaniel.<sup>12</sup>

This second note, to Nathaniel, contains the first documentary evidence of John's interest in apple trees. It reads, in part, "I promise to pay Nathaniel Chapman . . . the sum of one hundred dollars in land or apple trees."

Numerous stories, including some serious biographies, place John in Pittsburgh during the late 1790s. Frequently they have him working in the boat yards building the flatboats used by early migrants. There may be a grain of fact behind some of these stories. John's whereabouts in the early 1790s, from the time he left his father's home in Longmeadow

until his appearance in that mountain snowstorm near Warren in 1797, are totally unknown. He may very well have been traveling in the Pittsburgh area, although it is doubtful that he held a steady job there. One piece of documentary evidence which might place John in the Pittsburgh area does exist. In 1794, a John Chapman (no provable connection) took an oath of allegiance to the new United States in Somerset Township, Washington County, a few miles southwest of Pittsburgh.<sup>13</sup>

The full development of the Pittsburgh story, which has Johnny running a sort of travelers' aid station for migrants in the city of Pittsburgh, and incidentally handing out little leather bags of apple seeds to the new settlers, can be traced to a novel titled Johnny Appleseed, the Romance of the Sower, written in 1915 by Mrs. Eleanor Atkinson. The Romance was another purely fictional book, but like so many other stories, it contained just enough logic, historical fact, and convincing detail that it was widely accepted as the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

No deed or other record of land owned by Johnny in Pennsylvania has yet been found.<sup>14</sup> It is probable that John never succeeded in establishing title to any Pennsylvania land, so it is almost impossible to trace the locations of the early nurseries. Early county histories reliably locate one orchard, possibly his first, on Big Brokenstraw Creek in Warren County and another on French Creek near the town of Franklin in Venago County. Both of these nurseries were in operation during the period roughly from 1797 or 1798 to 1804. Less reliable sources and local traditions tell of other nurseries scattered around the general area. John seems to have located his nurseries near the main settlement routes and then traveled from one to another to care for the trees

and to sell seedlings to the settlers.

Apparently, as Judge Wetmore indicated, John did not have much success in Pennsylvania. In the early 1800s he moved farther west into Ohio. It has been suggested that the two notes John signed in Franklin in 1804 were for the purpose of obtaining funds to finance his westward expansion.

## II. THE OHIO FRONTIER

Whatever the reason, John's decision to move into Ohio was a sound one. Vast areas of the east central portion were now open to settlement. In 1801, the year generally established for Johnny's first entrance into Licking County, the county held only three white families.<sup>15</sup> John Larabee was living in a huge hollow sycamore tree while he built a cabin and tried to get a claim established.<sup>16</sup> By the end of the decade, most of the land had been taken up, towns platted, and families moved in. In 1800, the population of Ohio was not above 40,000. By 1830, when Johnny moved his base of operations farther west into Indiana, it was almost a million.<sup>17</sup> Many of these new settlers became customers of Johnny Appleseed.

In these days of supermarkets, vitamin-enriched diets, and home freezers, it is easy to overlook the importance of apples to the early settlers. Apples provided a welcome accent in an otherwise monotonous pioneer diet. Apples were the easiest of all fruits to get into production and were also the easiest to store for year-round use, without the addition of expensive sugar. Pioneer families customarily dried many bushels of apples for winter eating and cooked many

more bushels into apple butter. Apple cider by the barrel, one source estimates seven to ten barrels or 250 gallons for a large family,<sup>18</sup> was pressed at community cider mills. Many more barrels of cider were distilled into apple brandy, called "applejack" on the frontier. Applejack had the virtue of commanding a much higher price in relation to its weight and bulk than almost any other product grown in the west, a fact which made it an important cash crop for export in the days when all transport was primitive and expensive.<sup>19</sup> So important was apple growing considered that in some parts of Ohio, a new settler was required to plant a certain number of trees, fifty or more, before he could receive the full title to his land.<sup>20</sup>

With a guaranteed market and an ever-growing number of customers, many nurserymen were drawn to the new state of Ohio. John Chapman was by no means the only seller of apple trees in the new territory; he was not even the first. By 1796, Rufus Putnam had an extensive orchard consisting of many varieties of high-quality, grafted trees located near Marietta.<sup>21</sup> In 1808, Washington County, around Marietta, counted 774 acres of fruit trees.

Nor were Johnny's apple trees of the best quality. Johnny steadfastly refused to improve any of his trees by grafting good quality branches onto the seedling roots, a common and well-known practice even on the frontier. Instead, John insisted on growing his trees strictly from seed, even though he must have known that trees grown in this manner will almost certainly produce inferior fruit.

The advantages that Johnny enjoyed over his competition were two; volume, and a sense of location, what Robert Price called "strategic geography."<sup>22</sup> No other orchardist planted as many nurseries as did John, and no other orchardist located

his nurseries so carefully, always just ahead of the first settlers in an area and frequently just where a new center of population would spring up.

The list of Johnny's verified nurseries in Ohio is long, and there is hardly a city, town, or country crossroads throughout central Ohio that does not claim in its local traditions that "Johnny Appleseed planted trees here." In his biography of Chapman, Price listed in Ohio alone, thirty nurseries for which he could locate at least one reliable early reference. These were established nurseries, usually operated over a period of several years, and given regular care. It also appears that Johnny was in the habit of making other plantings wherever he happened to be in his wanderings, perhaps at the home of a farmer who gave him lodging for the night or simply in a natural clearing in the woods, no matter who owned the land.

Judging from the records available to us, it was apparently John's practice to scout a likely location for a nursery and then to beg, buy, or lease a plot of ground on which to plant his trees. He would clear the ground, prepare the soil, erect a fence to keep out browsing cattle and deer, and plant his seeds, carefully gathered from cider mills in the more settled areas he had just left. If the nursery was to be a major one, Johnny frequently would build a lean-to or rough cabin to provide himself with shelter or would arrange to board with a nearby farmer.

Some idea of the time involved may be deduced from a bill for boarding submitted to John's administrators after his death. In 1836, Johnny bought seventy-four acres of land in Wabash Township, Jay County, Indiana. The next year John boarded for twelve weeks with Joseph Hill who lived near this land. In 1838, he stayed eighteen weeks and in 1839, ten weeks. In 1840, and for the years following

up until his death, he stayed only two, three, or four weeks.<sup>23</sup> Presumably, these first three years were taken up in the major labor of establishing the nursery after which it required only periodic care and maintenance. Most likely this pattern was repeated time and again at other nursery locations.

Except for two town lots purchased in 1809 in newly-platted Mount Vernon, no record exists that John formally obtained title to any land during his early days in Ohio. It is probable that, up until 1814 or 1815, John was concentrating on planting his trees on land already owned by other farmers who could be relied on to watch over the trees in return for a share of the new-grown seedlings.

On May 31, 1814, John changed his method of operations and began the first of a series of sixteen verifiable land acquisitions. Eventually he bought or leased and sometimes forfeited or sold more than eleven hundred acres of land and six town lots, sometimes paying with the promise of apple trees, but more often paying cash in hand. Despite the customary portrayal of him as a man living in poverty, eating only the most meager food, and wearing ragged clothing, John was a man of considerable substance, especially in rare ready cash; although he used his wealth for charity and to further his work, not for his own personal comfort.

In Cincinnati markets in 1806, the price of a seedling apple tree hovered between six and seven cents,<sup>24</sup> which seems to support the price which Johnny traditionally charged for his trees, a "fip-penny bit" which was worth about six and one-half cents in Ohio at that time.<sup>25</sup> These same traditions also insist that, if the purchaser was unable to pay in cash, Johnny would willingly accept cast-off clothing, a bit of cornmeal, or even a promise to pay at some unspecified time in the future. He was reported to

17

have given trees to needy families, often with a gift of money as well.

Several documents pertaining to Johnny's business dealings have come down to us. An order for trees from one of his nurseries was discovered in 1952 in the possession of Mrs. Grace Culler of Shiloh, Ohio, a niece of the Rosella Rice whose recollections of John have added so much to the Appleseed myth.<sup>26</sup> The order, dated August 21, 1818, at Richland County, is obviously addressed to the caretaker at one of Johnny's nurseries. It reads, "Mr. Martin Mason: Sir, please to let Eben Rice or bearer have thirty-eight apple trees and you will oblige your friend. . . . John Chapman." Another order, now in the possession of the Mansfield Boy Scouts, is dated October, 1812, and reads in part, "For value received I promise to pay . . . Benjamin Burrell, one hundred and fifty apple trees at my nursery near John Butlers and the mouth of the Mohican, such as they are when called for." A note dated August 25, 1820, reads simply, "Mr. Odle: please to let Ebenezer Rice have the hoops." Nobody knows what it might have meant. Notes and orders such as these, along with a number of leases, deeds, tax records, and voters lists provide the framework of facts upon which that which is definitely known about Johnny's activities has been built.

### III. THE SWEDENborgIAN MISSIONARY

Most people today remember John Chapman only for his appleseeds and his charity. In his own time, he was almost as well-known for his religious beliefs.

John was baptized in the Congregational Church,

but throughout his adult life, he was a follower of the beliefs of Emanuel Swedenborg. Swedenborg was a brilliant eighteenth-century scientist and philosopher whose investigations led him to believe in a spiritual world closely paralleling the real one, a world in which each person had a corresponding spiritual existence which continued after his death. Swedenborg also taught that the way to happiness in the spiritual world was to live a life of service and self-denial in this one.<sup>27</sup> The doctrines were complicated and the religion was one which appealed mainly to intellectuals.

It is well known that John lived his life in accordance with these teachings, but it is not known when he first accepted them. Consequently, the story of his conversion to Swedenborgianism has become a favorite one for imaginative storytellers. Henry Pershing wrote that John first became acquainted with Swedenborg's teachings during those mythical years at Harvard. Mrs. Atkinson had him introduced to the doctrines during a visit to Isle le Beau where Harman Blennerhasset lived in kingly splendor. A long-standing, but still unproven, tradition in the Swedenborgian Church states that John's first contact with the teachings was through Judge John Young, a western Pennsylvania lawyer and member of the Church of the New Jerusalem. This tradition also claims that Judge Young supplied Johnny with many of the books he later distributed in the West. Perhaps the only provably accurate statement which we can make about John's conversion is that it is not known when or how it took place but that it was certainly very early in his career.

Other details of John's missionary work can be more definitely established. In fact, the earliest printed reference to John Chapman yet discovered appears in a New Church report printed in January,

Mr Martin Major Sir please  
to let Grandmire or his son have  
thirty eight apple trees and you will  
oblige your friend John Chapman  
Richland Co Ohio  
August the 21st 1818

Give John Oliver One hundred  
and fifty trees when he goes for them  
to some of my vissaries on Nelson-  
waters John Chapman

John Chapman's Estate do to  
Richard Weller for funeral expenses  
expense of making ten dollars  
- Expenses for laying him out three dollars  
- less forty four cts  
Expense of coffin to Samuel Fletcher six dollars  
March the 18. 1845

I witness the Above Statement to be  
true  
Richard Weller

1817, in Manchester, England.<sup>28</sup> The account, taken from a letter from a Philadelphia correspondant, does not mention John by name. However, it gives details of his ascetic life, describes his planting methods, and says, "the profits of the whole are intended for the purpose of enabling him to print all of the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg and distribute them." This report also contains the first mention of John's practice of dividing a book into parts for greater distribution.

Numerous letters written by New Church members mention John. One, dated May 15, 1821, from Daniel Thunn to Margaret Bailey,<sup>29</sup> mentions an offer by John Chapman to deed to the New Church 160 acres of land in return for payment in New Church books, then states, "This is the Appleseed man you certainly must have heard of." Another letter, this one written by William Schlatter,<sup>30</sup> a wealthy and prominent New Church supporter, dated November 18, 1822, contains the earliest written mention of John's nickname. It reads, in part, "there was but one receiver and that was Mr. John Chapman, whom you must have heard me speak of. They call him John Appleseed out there." This letter, and an entry under the name "John Appleseed" in the ledger of the Fort Wayne trading firm of Hamilton and Taber in 1840, establish the name by which John Chapman was known during most of his life. The diminutive, "Johnny Appleseed" apparently became used as the legends about him grew and flowered.

John was apparently a very active missionary for the New Church. Numerous tales and memoirs tell of his capable and intelligent discussion of the doctrines of Swedenborg and many of them mention specific instances of theological arguments, most of which, of course, Johnny won hands down.

In at least one documented instance, John appears

to have been instrumental in establishing a New Church congregation, at Mansfield, Ohio. A letter from William Schlatter to John in 1820, obviously a reply to a previous request from John, details the procedure to be followed in order to have brother Silas Ensign, a converted Methodist minister, licensed as lay reader for the group.<sup>31</sup>

The most enduring story of John's missionary work, repeated over and over, has him begging lodging and food at some lonely settler's cabin, then pulling out his Testament and offering to read some "news right fresh from Heaven." Afterward he would offer to leave some of his Swedenborgian books, obtained from Church members in the East. Many references record that he would divide a book into several parts and leave only one section at a time to widen its circulation.

#### IV. MYTHS IN THE MAKING

By the middle part of his sojourn in Ohio, Johnny Appleseed was rapidly becoming one of the most storied characters of the frontier, known in person or by reputation all over the state. Most of the tales have come down to us through the works of three authors. The earliest of these was Henry Howe's Historical Collections of Ohio, first published in 1847. Howe traveled throughout the state of Ohio collecting local traditions and personal recollections as well as documented facts. Unfortunately, he neglected to distinguish the facts from the memories in his book. Later editions of the Historical Collections added a section on Johnny written by Rosella Rice, daughter of the Ebenezer Rice to whom Johnny gave those mysterious hoops, who knew him when she was a

child. Throughout the 1850s, Rosella published numerous letters and magazine articles containing her romanticized recollections of Johnny. The most widely circulated and still the most famous account of Johnny appeared in an article written by W. D. Haley in Harper's New Monthly Magazine in November 1871. All three of these accounts collected the stories popular in the years after Johnny's death. The stories were repeated as fact over and over in the many county and local histories published in the ensuing years.

Here was the small, wiry man with the unshaven beard and penetrating eyes; the ragged, cast-off clothing; and the pasteboard hat with the huge brim.<sup>32</sup> The tin pot hat seems to have been purely a fabrication by Henry Howe.<sup>33</sup> The picture of Johnny



is variously supposed to have been drawn by a student at Otterbein College who knew Johnny or from a

description given by Rosella Rice. Other stories told of the man filled with remorse for having killed a rattlesnake which had bitten him; the man who would quench his campfire to prevent a mosquito from being burned; the man who would sleep in the snow to avoid disturbing a sleeping bear and her cubs. Here were the stories of matrimonial disappointments and of the man who brought gifts of calico and ribbons to delight the little girls. Among the tales of Johnny's philanthropy and kindness, was the story of how, out of a misguided belief in the healing properties of the evil-smelling weed called dog-fennel, Johnny sowed its seeds in the vicinity of every cabin he passed until, in the words of W. D. Haley, "to this day the dog-fennel . . . is one of the worst grievances of the Ohio farmers."

Many of these stories are probably based on fact. Some of them are attributed to early pioneers who claimed to have heard them directly from Johnny. Others can be documented from independent sources.

A story which may contain more fact than fiction describes John's role during the Indian unrest of 1812. That summer, after war was declared with England, there were a number of Indian attacks and scares in the Mansfield-Mount Vernon area. Johnny, who knew the forest trails better than anyone else, either volunteered or was retained to travel to the outlying cabins to keep the settlers warned of Indian activities. After at least one false alarm, a real Indian attack took place in September at Mansfield. The ten white families in the area immediately retreated to the blockhouse and decided to send for help to Mount Vernon, thirty miles away. John Chapman volunteered to make the trip. Although the earliest account of the event insists that Johnny rode horseback,<sup>34</sup> the story most often told is that John

ran all the way, stopping only to warn isolated settlers with the cry, "the tribes of the heathen are round about your doors and a devouring flame followeth after them." At any rate, Johnny made the trip and returned with the soldiers early the next morning.

The most widespread of all the Johnny Appleseed folk tales is the so-called "primitive Christian" episode. The location, the details, and the name of the minister vary from one account to the next, but the classic story goes something like this: Johnny is among the audience listening to an itinerant missionary who has been sermonizing at considerable length against evil and vice of all sorts. Trying, by contrast, to shame his listeners, some of whom have begun to indulge in the carnal vanities of calico cloth and store-bought tea, the missionary repeatedly inquires of the audience, "Where now is there a man who, like the primitive Christians, is traveling to Heaven barefooted and clad in coarse raiment?" Finally, in the words of W. D. Haley, "When this interrogation had been repeated beyond all reasonable endurance, Johnny rose from the log on which he was reclining; and advancing to the speaker, he placed one of his bare feet upon the stump which served for a pulpit; and pointing to his coffee sack garment, he quietly said, 'Here's your primitive Christian.' The well-clothed missionary hesitated, stammered, and dismissed the congregation."

One clue to the identity of this missionary is given in a letter written by John W. Dawson to the Fort Wayne Sentinel in response to the article in Harper's. Dawson states that, in 1830, an itinerant preacher named Adam Payne came to Fort Wayne and proceeded to "scold the Devil" on a downtown street corner. At the end of the "scold," Johnny, who was again present, went forward and reminded Payne of the incident at Mansfield. According to Dawson,

Payne recognized Johnny at once. If Payne was the minister involved, Haley's description of him as the "well-clothed missionary" is singularly inapt. Payne was another widely-known figure on the frontier. He was every bit as shabby in his personal appearance as was John.

## V. WESTWARD TO INDIANA

Sometime before 1830, Johnny decided to move his base of operations farther to the west. Ohio was rapidly becoming a settled and civilized country, and the market for his services was moving steadily westward.

Several different dates have been given for Johnny's first trip through western Ohio and into Indiana, including some very early scouting trips. John's first documented trip into western Ohio occurred in 1828. His route can be traced by the trail of leases he left behind as he acquired small plots of land for nurseries; one at Fort Amanda, another at St. Mary's, and a third at what is now the town of Rockford. The route suggests that he may have continued on into Fort Wayne floating down the St. Mary's River to the Maumee and then back down the Maumee into Ohio.<sup>35</sup> Working from leases, deed registers, tax payments, and similar records, Robert Price has identified a regular yearly cycle of travels starting from Mansfield in the spring and following westward along the southern route to care for his leased nurseries, but returning to Mansfield each August.

Although the first documentary evidence of

Chapman's presence in Fort Wayne dates from April and May 1834, when John paid \$250 for two parcels of land along the Maumee River east of Fort Wayne,<sup>36</sup> local traditions place him in Fort Wayne much earlier than 1834. John Dawson gave the year as 1830. Helm, an early historian of Allen County, said that John arrived in 1828 and planted a nursery on the west bank of the St. Joseph River north of Fort Wayne. This nursery later figured prominently in the dispute over the location of Johnny's grave. Dawson mentioned it in his letter but no documentary evidence has ever been found to confirm its existence. Other, less reliable reports place the date of the first visit as early as 1822.<sup>37</sup>

In documented records, Fort Wayne appears as the westernmost point in John's travels. In legend, however, Johnny visited with Daniel Boone in Kentucky and Abraham Lincoln in Illinois. He planted nurseries in southern Michigan and sang folk songs in northern Missouri. Robert Price reported a letter from a California woman seriously claiming that Johnny planted the first orchards in her state. Eben Chapman claimed that his father and Johnny once made a trip to Kansas, tying the tails of their horses together to avoid becoming separated while swimming across the Mississippi River.<sup>38</sup>

The only written hint of a western journey is contained in a letter to A. Banning Norton of Knox County, Ohio from a former resident then living in Whitesides County, Illinois. The letter stated that in the fall of 1843 Johnny Appleseed passed through the county on his way from Iowa to a Swedenborgian Convention in Philadelphia.<sup>39</sup> However, there is no evidence that John was ever in Iowa, and he did not attend the Swedenborgian Convention.<sup>40</sup>

By 1836, Johnny had completed his move from Mansfield to Fort Wayne. From that time on he

considered himself a resident of Allen County, Indiana.<sup>41</sup> He continued to visit in Ohio every summer up until a year or two before his death, keeping up many of his nurseries and visiting old friends. The most lasting portrait of him as a saintly, white-haired, ragged old man was developed during these years and applied to the earlier stories, so that even in the stories of his early adventures he seems to appear old and worn.<sup>42</sup>

In Indiana John bought five fairly large parcels of land for which records have been found. Besides the two plots already mentioned on the Maumee, John bought seventy-four acres in Wabash Township, Jay County; forty acres in Eel River Township, Allen County; and another eighteen acres on the Maumee River near one of his earlier plots.<sup>43</sup>

Of the three tracts along the Maumee, only one was properly developed, but on that one plot of forty-two acres, John had a nursery of 15,000 trees growing in 1845.<sup>44</sup> The only other plot which Johnny is known to have improved was the one in Jay County. Johnny himself worked on this land starting in 1837, boarding at the time with Joseph Hill. Also, William Broom, who had married John's sister Percis, cleared about fifteen acres of land, built a log cabin, and hewed timber for a barn on Johnny's land.<sup>45</sup> Since the Brooms lived nearby, it has been suspected that Johnny, by now almost seventy, was planning to move to Jay County.<sup>46</sup> If this was Johnny's intention, death claimed him before he could see it realized.

## VI. DEATH AND BURIAL

Not even historians, let alone the storytellers, can agree on the circumstances of Johnny's death. According to the usual story, John was working at a nursery twenty miles from Fort Wayne when word was brought that cattle had broken into a nursery in Allen County. Johnny immediately set off to protect his trees, walking the entire distance in one day. On reaching Fort Wayne, John applied for lodging at the home of a Mr. Worth, but overcome by his exertions, he died during the night, or, as some say, after a short illness.

The date of Johnny's death can be established with reasonable certainty. In 1934 his obituary notice was rediscovered in the March 22, 1845, edition of the Fort Wayne Sentinel by Miss Eva Peck of the Fort Wayne Public Library. The obituary reads in part, "Died--in this city on Tuesday last (March 18) Mr. Thomas McJanet . . . On the same day, in this neighborhood, at an advanced age, Mr. John Chapman (better known by the name of Johnny Appleseed.)" After a few laudatory remarks the notice concluded, "His death was quite sudden. We saw him on our streets only a day or two previous."

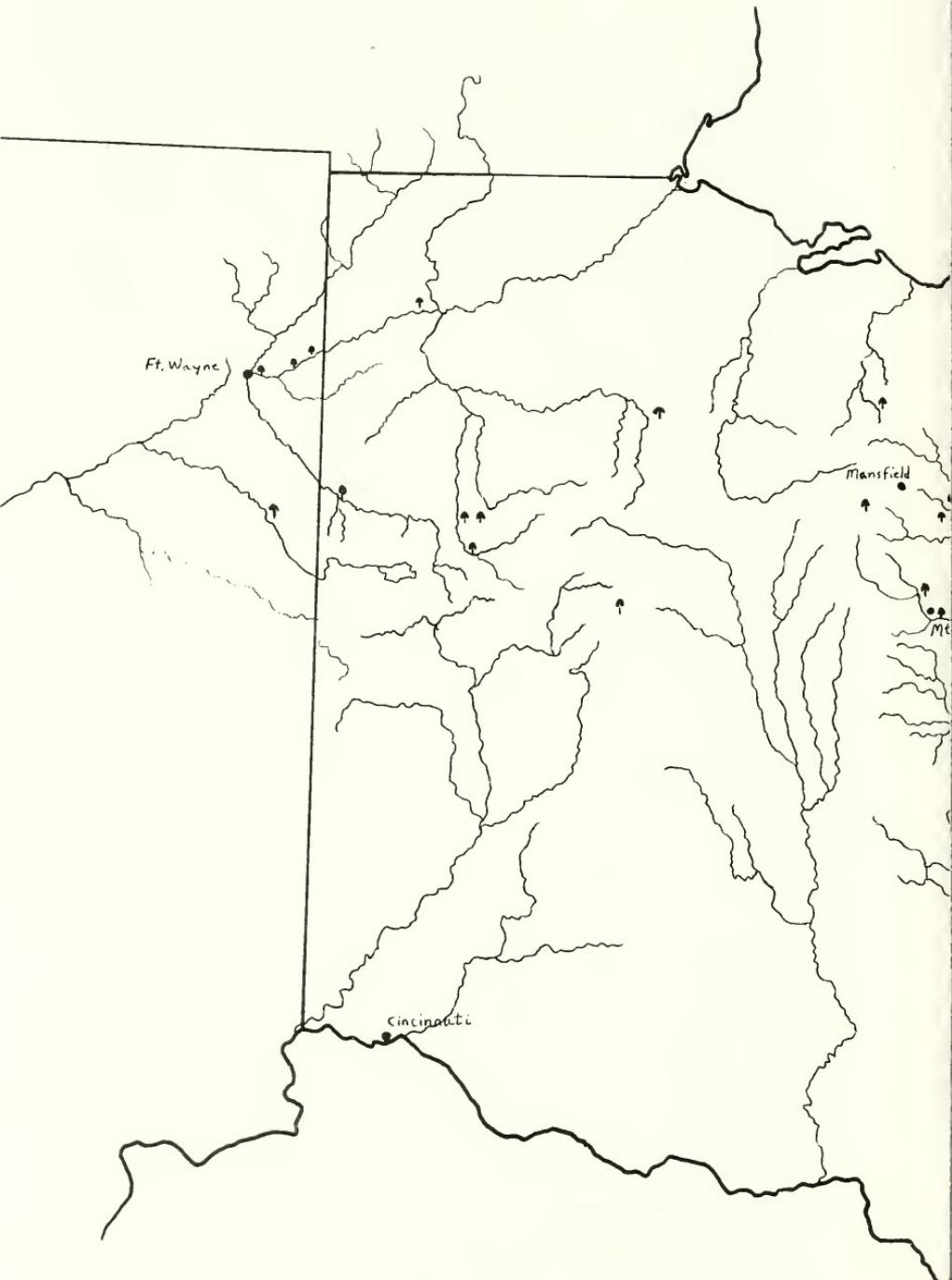
The fact that the Sentinel did not give the exact date of death has supported the belief that the actual date was the "Tuesday last" of the previous week, March 11. However, the Fort Wayne Times and Peoples Press of March 22, also ran an obituary, not of John, but of the Thomas McJanet referred to by the Sentinel with these words, "Died--In this city on the 18th . . . Mr. Thomas McJanet." This confirms that John did indeed die on March 18, 1845.

The circumstances of his death have not been so neatly confirmed. Nearly all accounts agree that

John died of a disease which Dawson called the "winter plague," probably a form of pneumonia. Nearly all agree that he died at the home of a Mr. Worth in St. Joseph Township near the St. Joseph River.

Early and traditional accounts placed this home on the west side of the river near the feeder canal and stated that the burial took place in the Archer Cemetery.<sup>47</sup> This is the site which was marked in 1916 by the Indiana Horticultural Society. It has been developed into the present Johnny Appleseed Park. When a commission was formed in 1934 to improve the memorial at the Archer gravesite, a rival claimant came forward. A considerable amount of tradition and some evidence was produced which seemed to indicate that the Worth cabin and John Chapman's grave were on the east side of the river on a farm later owned by Wesley S. Roebuck.<sup>48</sup> Roebuck spent many years tracking down witnesses, relatives of early pioneers, and evidence to support his case. He and his researchers located much of the documentary evidence relating to Johnny Appleseed's activities in the Fort Wayne area. As with most of the other stories which grew up around Johnny, there was just enough fact and logic behind the Roebuck version to make it ring true. A look at the development of this controversy gives a prime example of how the latest Johnny Appleseed myth was created.

The Christian name of the "Mr. Worth" has never been reliably established. Proponents of the Archer burial site pointed to the Dawson letter which stated that Johnny died "at the house of William Worth . . . on the land now owned by Jesse Cole." Roebuck uncovered evidence which seemed to indicate that Johnny died at the home of a Richard Worth and that this home was east of the river on the Roebuck farm. Neither faction was able to produce any documentary





evidence, although Roebuck was able to prove the existence of a Worth family on the east bank of the river around 1845 from registers of deeds.

Our own investigations in preparing this pamphlet have shown that the Worths were a large family group, members of which lived on both sides of the St. Joseph River. In 1840, a Richard Worth was living east of the river on or near the land later owned by Roebuck. A David Worth was living west of the river on or near land which was later owned by Jesse Cole.<sup>49</sup> The 1840 census does not indicate where William Worth was living, although church records show that he was in the area at the time.<sup>50</sup>

Some of Roebuck's evidence was based on traditions handed down in the family of Christian Parker, an early pioneer who had owned a sawmill near the disputed site. Parker claimed to have sawn the boards from which Johnny's coffin was made. The major foundation of the Roebuck case was the testimony of Eben Miles Chapman, who claimed to be a grandson of Andrew Chapman, brother of Johnny Appleseed. Eben Chapman's testimony was especially convincing as he pointed out the location of the Worth cabin, the graveyard, a spring, and an abandoned road. Descendants of Christian Parker were contacted and swore statements telling how the story of Johnny's burial in the eastern plot had been handed down in the family. Some of them visited the Roebuck farm and pointed out the supposed gravesite.

Nor were the Archer supporters idle. Descendants of Christian Parker were contacted and swore statements telling how the story of Johnny's burial in the Archer Cemetery had been handed down in the family.<sup>51</sup> Researchers discovered and published a letter written in 1903 by the grandson of David Archer, locating the Worth home on the Leo Road west of the river on Jesse Cole's land.

The controversy raged hotter. The daughter of a man who helped build Johnny's coffin identified the site on the Roebuck farm where her father had told her Johnny was buried. The son of the man who got paid for building the coffin claimed his father told him that he, personally, buried Johnny at the Archer site. An old neighbor identified a site on the west bank as the Worth cabin. Broken pottery and rotted timbers were found on the site. Roebuck excavated a site on his farm and found broken pottery and rotted timbers.

At the height of the controversy, Mrs. Mary Anna Wellsh came forward to declare that she was the niece of Johnny Appleseed, that his real name was John Sheffield, and that he was actually buried somewhere near New Haven.

In December 1934 the Johnny Appleseed Commission rendered its final verdict. The Archer site was confirmed. The Roebuck faction appealed to the American Pomological Society.

Both sides spent the ensuing few years developing evidence and consolidating their positions, and, at times the controversy became quite bitter. In 1942, after seven years of study, the Pomological Society made its report. It accepted the Roebuck site. Strangely enough, there was no immediate explosion of reaction. For one thing, World War II had directed people's minds elsewhere. For another, new evidence had come to light, although it apparently had not been taken into account by the Pomological Society.

In 1939, after considerable research, Florence Wheeler, public librarian of Leominster, Massachusetts, succeeded in producing a documented lineage of John Chapman's ancestors and relatives. This evidence showed that Roebuck's star witness, Eben Miles Chapman, was mistaken in his most basic testimony. Eben Chapman had claimed to be descended from an Andrew Chapman, brother of Johnny,

but Miss Wheeler's evidence proved that John had no brother Andrew, and the bulk of the Roebuck testimony was thus discredited. What remained was mostly hearsay, and conflicting hearsay testimony was readily available to counteract it. A conflicting genealogy, produced by Mrs. Roebuck,<sup>52</sup> which did trace Eben Chapman back to an Andrew Chapman, brother of John, was based on "family records and memories" and was given no more consideration than it deserved.<sup>53</sup> The Pomological Society report was largely ignored. The discredited Roebuck version has nevertheless been printed as fact in a number of books and articles and has been used in some tellings of the folk legend of Johnny Appleseed.

Nevertheless, neither Johnny's death nor burial site can be regarded as conclusively proved. There is a body of circumstantial evidence which still suggests that the death took place on the east side of the river on or near the land which later became the Roebuck farm. The Worths were established on the east bank of the St. Joseph River, as were the Parkers and other families associated with the funeral. John himself had several plots of land along the Maumee east of the St. Joseph, but there is no hard evidence for the supposed nursery on the Archer farm. The only man whom documentary evidence connects with the death and burial, Samuel C. Fletter who was paid for building John's coffin, lived east of the river. Most important, a statement by Richard Worth, recorded only thirteen years after the event and interpreted in light of our existing knowledge, seems to indicate that Johnny died on the land east of the river, even though that same statement makes it clear that John was buried in the Archer graveyard.

In view of all this, the most definite conclusion we can draw is that Johnny is probably buried somewhere on the mound in the old Archer Cemetery. He

is almost certainly not buried at the very top under his marker. Samuel Fletter said the grave was on the east side, near the foot.<sup>54</sup> In 1914, John Archer located it "on the side of the hill, several feet southwest of the crest,"<sup>55</sup> even though fourteen years earlier, he himself had written, "at this time I doubt that any person could . . . come within fifty feet of pointing out his grave."<sup>56</sup>

In the absence of documented facts, the story-tellers have turned Johnny's death and burial into a beautiful and touching tale of his last supper with the Worths; the reading of the Bible, especially the Beatitude "Blessed are the pure in heart;" the old man dying calmly and at peace with the world; the neighbors coming for miles to hear the funeral sermon; the pallbearers chosen from among the most prominent men in town; and, of course, the apple blossoms drifting silently down upon the coffin.

This was a beautiful ending for the legend, but it was almost certainly not true. None of the men named as pallbearers, Thomas Swinney, Judge Thompson, or Henry Rudisill, ever mentioned the funeral in any writings which have come down to us. John H. Archer, grandson of David Archer, who may have attended the funeral, listed the names of the families present but did not mention any pallbearers or give any indication of an elaborate funeral service.<sup>57</sup> Richard Worth, whom Pershing and others have named as the "well-known Methodist circuit-rider" who preached the funeral sermon, was, in fact, a Baptist elder who had been excluded from his church in a factional dispute the year previously.<sup>58</sup> Finally, the gently floating apple blossoms were only another fabrication. Johnny was buried soon after March 18, 1845. The first apple blossoms in the Fort Wayne area that year did not bloom until April 17.<sup>59</sup>

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Birth record of John Chapman. City Clerk's Office, Leominster, Massachusetts. "John Chapman Son of Nathanael and Elizabeth Chapman Born at Leominster September ye 26th 1774."
2. Located "at the fork in South Nashua Street, Leominster, Massachusetts."
3. Robert Price, Johnny Appleseed, Man and Myth (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1954), p. 16.
4. Vital Records of Leominster, Massachusetts (Worcester: Franklin Price, 1911), pp. 37, 301.
5. Richard Storrs, Proceedings at the Centennial Celebration of Longmeadow (Hartford, 1883), p. 223.
6. Florence E. Wheeler. "John Chapman's Line of Descent from Edward Chapman of Ipswich," Ohio Archaeological and Historical Quarterly 48 (1939): 28-33.
7. Letter from Clifford K. Shipton, Custodian of the Harvard University Archives, to Kenneth Dirlam, quoted in Dirlam, John Chapman (Mansfield: Richland County Historical Society, 1954), p. 19.
8. Harlan Hatcher et al., Johnny Appleseed: A Voice in the Wilderness (Paterson, N. J.: The Swedenborg Press, 1947), p. 50.
9. J. S. Schenck and W. S. Rann, History

of Warren County, Pennsylvania (Syracuse, 1887), pp. 153-154. Copied from the Warren, Ledger, 1853.

10. J. H. Newton, History of Venago County, Pennsylvania (Columbus: J. A. Caldwell, 1879).

11. Federal Census of 1800, Venago County, Pennsylvania, p. 593.

12. Johnny never paid off the two notes. Copies were presented as claims against his estate after his death but they were not paid. One of the real mysteries about Johnny concerns the Rudd note. Elizabeth Rudd's children had died in September, 1803. So why did John make this note payable to them?

13. Henry Baldwin. The Henry R. Baldwin Genealogical Records. (Youngstown: The Public Library of Youngstown and Mahoning County, 1963), 24:46-47.

14. Price, Johnny Appleseed, pp. 28-29.

15. Hatcher, Johnny Appleseed, p. 49.

16. Price, Johnny Appleseed, p. 51.

17. Merit Students Encyclopedia (1967), s.v. "Ohio."

18. Alice A. Martin, All About Apples (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1976), p. 48.

19. Price, Johnny Appleseed, p. 40.

20. Ibid.

21. N. N. Hill, History of Knox County, Ohio (Mt. Vernon: A. A. Graham, 1881), pp. 156-157. Hill names the early nurserymen in the area and gives details of their plantings. He barely mentions John, gives no details, and merely says that John did, "without doubt, much good."
22. Price, Johnny Appleseed, pp. 25, 63.
23. John Chapman Estate Papers, 11, Allen County Clerk's Office, Fort Wayne.
24. Price, Johnny Appleseed, p. 285.
25. Israel Ward Andrews, "McMaster on Our Early Money," Magazine of Western History 4 (1886): 141-150.
26. Dirlam, John Chapman (3d ed.), p. 25.
27. "The Religion of Johnny Appleseed," in Hatcher, Johnny Appleseed, pp. 40-41.
28. Society for Printing, Publishing and Circulating the Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg, Report (Manchester, Eng: Jan. 14, 1817).
29. Quoted Hatcher, Johnny Appleseed, p. 50.
30. William Schlatter, Some Letters of William Schlatter 1814 to 1825, typescript, Cambridge, Mass., New Church Theological School Library, letter dated November 18, 1822.
31. Ibid., letter dated March 20, 1820.
32. Authority for the pasteboard hat and the

description of it is Rosella Rice, quoted in Henry Howe, Historical Collections of Ohio, 1891 ed., p. 485.

33. None of the writers who claimed to have known or seen Johnny mentions the tin pot hat. The first recorded mention of the hat is in Howe, Historical Collections of Ohio, 1847 ed. It is not known where Howe got his information.

34. A. Banning Norton, History of Knox County (Columbus: Richard Nevins, 1862), p. 140.

35. Price, Johnny Appleseed, pp. 198-199.

36. Entered at the Fort Wayne Land Office April 28, 1934 (fractional SE 1/4 N of M Sec. 28. Twp 3 N Range 14 E 42.11 acres) and May 23, 1834 (fractional SE 1/4 Sec. 3 Twp 3 N Range 15 E 99.03 acres). Robert Harris located a tract book containing these entries in the Allen County Auditor's Office before 1955.

37. William Glines, Johnny Appleseed by One Who Knew Him, (Columbus, 1922), p. 8.

38. "John Chapman's Kin Points Out Grave and Cabin," Fort Wayne Journal-Gazette, December 10, 1934.

39. Norton, Knox County, p. 135.

40. Price, Johnny Appleseed, p. 218, quoting records of the New Church convention.

41. In deeds, land applications, and other documents John listed his place of residence. By the

mid-1830s, he was giving his residence as Allen County, Indiana. Probate proceedings after his death treated him as a resident of Allen County.

42. Price, Johnny Appleseed, p. 225.

43. Entered at the Fort Wayne Land Office March 10, 1836. (East fraction of SE 1/4 Sec. 4, Twp 31 N Range 15 E 18.7 acres.)

Entered at the Fort Wayne Land Office March 11, 1836. (SE fraction of NW 1/4 Section 3, Twp 24 N, Range 15 E 74.04 acres Jay County.)

Entered at the Fort Wayne Land Office May 16, 1838. (SE 1/4 of NW 1/4 Section 22, Twp 32 N, Range 11 E 40 acres.)

44. John Chapman Estate Papers, 6.

45. Ibid., 4, 15.

46. John had lived with the Brooms at Perrysville and later at Mansfield. Whatever home he had seems to have been with his sister.

47. Most of these were based upon the Dawson letter and a series of letters written by John Archer in the early 1900s.

48. Those interested in the development of the Roebuck version should consult the Roebuck Papers, the evidence, affidavits, and analyses compiled by Wesley Roebuck. They are available in typescript and microfilm versions at the Allen County-Fort Wayne Historical Society.

49. These names appear in the 1840 Federal Census of Allen County. Since the census was arranged

in the order in which the census-taker visited the various families, it can be assumed that families whose names appear in close proximity on the census sheet also lived relatively near each other. In Washington Township, the following names appear in this order: William Gloyd (Andrew Worth married Sarah Gloyd Jan. 11, 1843); David Worth; Jesse Cole; David Archer. In St. Joe Twp, the following names appear in order: Samuel C. Flutter; David Foland (Daniel Foland); Richard Worth. Elsewhere on the same page is the name Christian Parker.

50. After considerable research into the relationships of the Worth family, we have uncovered a few new facts and have formed some tentative conclusions. Our findings and suppositions appear in the Appendix.

51. Sworn affidavits of George A. Parker September 6, 1934); Peter Parker (September 10, 1934); and William Parker (September 6, 1934) obtained by the Johnny Appleseed Memorial Commission. Now in the files of the Fort Wayne Public Library.

52. Lizzie Roebuck, Genealogy of the Chapman Family: Relatives of John Chapman (Johnny Appleseed) (Fort Wayne, 1947.)

53. It also appears that some of the Roebuck affidavits were altered. The earliest affidavits published by the Roebucks claimed that Johnny died at the home of a Levi Worth according to the informants. When it became clear that no Levi Worth existed in the area at the time of Johnny's death, Roebuck accused H. B. Essex, his sales manager who had gathered the affidavits, of changing them to fit his own ideas (see the Roebuck Papers), and relieved

Essex of his information-gathering duties. The Johnny Appleseed Memorial Commission also obtained an affidavit from Theodore Ashley, brother of Sarah Anne Doctor, one of Roebuck's early informants. Ashley swore that he was present when his sister's statement was taken and that "the statement originally signed was changed, added to and modified and that a number of statements contained therein were not made by affiant's (Ashley's) sister." Ashley's affidavit is now in the possession of the Fort Wayne Public Library.

54. Quoted in Dawson's letter to the Fort Wayne Sentinel, October 21 and 23, 1871.

55. Letter from Leonard Brandt to Cliff Milnor, "Lines and Angles," Fort Wayne Journal-Gazette, November 19, 1964. Brandt was the Journal-Gazette photographer who photographed John Archer in 1914 when the latter visited the Archer graveyard for the purpose of locating the gravesite. Brandt distinctly remembered the site John Archer pointed out as being "several feet from the crest."

56. Letter from John H. Archer to O. P. Morgan, October 4, 1900, in A. J. Baughman, History of Richland County, Ohio (Chicago: S.J. Clarke, 1908), p. 217.

57. Ibid.

58. First Baptist Church, Records Book B, Entry under date April 20, 1844, Fort Wayne Public Library.

59. Rapin Andrews, Diary, Entry for April 17, 1845. Manuscript Collection, Indiana Division, Indiana State Library.

## APPENDIX

Where did Johnny Appleseed die?

Where is he buried?

Any attempt to locate John Chapman's death and burial sites through deductive processes must proceed from an investigation of the members of the Worth family, to determine their names and places of residence.

Most researchers have not recognized that there were several adult male Worths living in Allen County in 1845. We identified at least fifteen Worths, all related by birth or marriage, known to have resided in the area before 1845. At least two, probably three, and perhaps even four were married, heads of households by the time that Johnny Appleseed died at one of their homes. The problem is somewhat complicated by the fact that two of the men bore the same name, Richard. Following is a list of the Worths, with birth and death dates where known:

Richard Worth, Sr.	b.1780-1790	d.June, 1845
Elizabeth Worth, Sr.	b.1786	d.1869
David Worth	b.May 12, 1808	d.June 1, 1851
Mahala Worth	b.1817	
William Worth	b.1811	will dated Feb. 24, 1866
Andrew Worth	b.July 12, 1814	d.Sept.6, 1896
Sarah (Gloyd) Worth	b.Sept.26, 1824	d.Sept.22, 1917
John Worth	b.1820	

Richard Worth, Jr.	b. 1822*	d. Early 1864
Nancy Worth	b. 1831	d. Jan. 20, 1893
Elizabeth (Worth) Noah	b. 1826	
James Worth		
Hanna Worth		
Agnes (Worth) Welch		
Polly Worth		

We found no mention of other Worth names prior to 1845. The 1850 census lists several more Worths who are identifiable as minor children of one of the above. It also lists a Mary Worth, age 24, and an Ellen Worth, age 4, living in the household of John and Rebecca (DeHaven) Worth. John and Rebecca were married only two months before the census was taken, so Ellen must be the child of Mary. Ellen's father is not known. It is possible that Mary was another Worth sister or sister-in-law, widowed, divorced, or deserted by Ellen's father.

The family relationships among the various Worths have never been made clear, but we have formed some conclusions based on evidence uncovered while preparing this pamphlet. This new evidence has come from census returns, wills, deed registers, probate records, and the record books of the First Baptist Church of Fort Wayne, which numbered many of the Worths among its early membership. For the first time, it is now possible to draw

\* The 1850 census lists Richard's age as 28; giving a probable birth date some time in 1822. In the 1860 census, Richard's age is given as 40, requiring a birth date in 1820. If the latter figure is true, Richard may have been a twin to John, but, more probably, Richard simply rounded off his age in the 1860 enumeration, a common practice at the time.



Johnny Appleseed.  
(HARPER'S MAGAZINE, November, 1871)

conclusions about the death and burial of Johnny Appleseed, based on a relatively large body of factual information about the people reported to have been most closely involved.

Richard Worth, Sr. was the patriarch of the clan. He was the father of most, if not all, of the Worths in the above list. James Worth was either the brother or one of the elder sons of Richard, Sr. James Worth was not involved in the Johnny Appleseed story, having left the Fort Wayne area several years before Johnny died. His account with the trading firm of Hamilton and Taber was closed in 1837 with the notation, "run off." He owed a total of \$49.39.

David, William, Andrew, John, Richard, Jr., Elizabeth, Jr., Agnes, Hanna, and Polly were probably the children of Richard, Sr. Because of the uncertainty about the relationship between Richard, Sr. and James Worth, there is some chance, but absolutely no evidence, that one or more of these could have been the children, or wife, of James Worth who stayed on with Richard after James left the Fort Wayne area.

We have determined the relationships among some of the Worths on our list. Mahala was Mrs. David Worth, according to the 1850 census of Whitley County, Indiana. The date of the marriage is not known, but they had a son, James Louis Worth, born July 10, 1836. Andrew Worth married a Sarah Gloyd on January 11, 1843. A Gloyd family lived next door to David Worth at the time of the 1840 census. Nancy Worth was the wife of Richard, Jr. Again the date of the marriage is not known so it is possible that Nancy was a member of the family in 1845, and she is listed accordingly. Richard and Nancy had a son, David Lewis Worth, born at Lorane, Indiana on January 13, 1849. John and William Worth were both married after 1845. John married Rebecca DeHaven

on March 27, 1850 in Fort Wayne. The only marriage record which has been found for William Worth shows that he married Sarah Baxter on September 17, 1858 in DeKalb County with Richard Worth officiating as Justice of the Peace. At the time, William was forty-seven years old, but there is no evidence that he had been married previously. Elizabeth Worth, Jr. married Lyell Noah and was living in Washington Township at the time of the 1850 census. Although we have uncovered no direct proof, we believe that Elizabeth, Sr. was the wife of Richard, Sr. Elizabeth was the only female Worth known to have been of approximately the same age as Richard. After Richard died and the other Worth men moved away, Elizabeth stayed on until her death in 1869, living with Lyell and Elizabeth Noah who would then have been her daughter and son-in-law.

Some confusion does still exist regarding the relationship among Richard, Sr., David, William, and Richard, Jr. Some accounts suggest that Richard, Sr., William, and David were brothers. Also, Robert Price, in his biography, Johnny Appleseed, Man and Myth, identifies Richard, Jr. as the son of William Worth. We believe that the confusion has stemmed from two sources: The general lack of information as to the number of Worths present in the area; and a statement by Thomas B. Helm, author of an early and usually quite accurate history of Allen County that, among the founders of the First Baptist Church were "Richard Worth and his brothers David and William and their wives." The church records make it clear that Richard, Sr. was a founding member along with David and William, but that Richard, Jr. was admitted to membership by baptism several days later.

Nevertheless, we have learned that William, David, Richard, Jr., Andrew, and John were of the

second-generation Worths in the area and we believe that they were all brothers, the sons of Richard, Sr. We know that their ages are distributed as we might expect in a father-son relationship. Richard, Sr. was born during the decade 1780-1790. Thus he was no younger than eighteen when David was born in 1808 and no older than forty-two when Richard, Jr. was born in 1822. By contrast, David, the oldest of the "second-generation" was only fourteen when Richard, Jr., the youngest, was born. Obviously, Richard, Jr. can only have been the son of Richard, Sr. This is the relationship which will prove to be of prime importance in determining in whose home John Chapman died.

There is other evidence which supports our conclusions about this relationship. On February 24, 1866, in Butler, DeKalb County, William Worth wrote his last will and testament. In this document, William bequeathed to David Lewis Worth, the son and heir of Richard, Jr. who had died two years earlier, "all my right, title, and interest in and to the use of the patent shingle machine which I bought of my brother Richard in the county of Whitley, in the state of Indiana." Richard, Jr. lived in Whitley County, off-and-on, for many years; we could find no evidence that Richard, Sr. ever even visited the county.

William Worth's testament provides other, rather circumstantial, evidence that he and Richard, Jr. were brothers. Having given his rights to the shingle machine to David Lewis, William left all the rest of his worldly goods to "my beloved sister, Mrs. Nancy Worth." Nancy Worth was the widow of Richard, Jr. and thus William's sister-in-law. If William had been the brother of Richard, Sr., Nancy would have been his niece.

. . . . .

The Worths came to Fort Wayne from Ohio in 1836 or 1837. Their records in the account books of Hamilton and Taber suggest that they were loggers supplying timber for the sawmills in the county, including perhaps the one operated by Christian Parker. They did not generally purchase land in Allen County, apparently preferring to rent cabins near their work sites or perhaps to live as squatters on the property of some absentee landowner.

Only one parcel of land in Allen County is known to have been owned by one of the Worths. On October 3, 1840, Andrew Worth bought a 40-acre plot near the center of St. Joseph Township for \$80.00. On October 12, he resold it to John Worth for that same amount. John held it until November 21, 1846 when he sold it to a John Gorig. Thus it can be shown that at least one member of the Worth family group owned land at the time John Chapman died--and east of the river in St. Joseph Township no less--but this land was located well back from the river and no one has yet suggested that Johnny Appleseed died or was buried on this particular plot.

At the time the 1840 census was taken, a Richard Worth, almost certainly Richard, Sr., was living east of the St. Joseph River, in St. Joseph Township, on or near the land which later became the Roebuck farm. David Worth was living west of the river in Washington Township on or near the land which was later owned by Jesse Cole. Judging from the census data and from the very specific locations established by Dawson, John Archer, and Wesley Roebuck and confirmed by on-site digging, the two Worth cabins were directly across the river from each other, no more than one-quarter to one-half mile apart and perhaps even within shouting distance. The 1840 census does not list any other Worths as heads of households, making it impossible to tell for certain

where William was living at the time.

It is difficult to reconcile the returns of the 1840 census with the known facts about the Worth family. The 1840 census listed only the head of the household by name. Members of the household were indicated only by noting the number of persons who fell into various categories of age and sex. By matching dates and known relationships with the census data, we can determine that the David Worth household was composed of David (age 32); Mahala, his wife (age 23); two young sons, James Louis (age 4) and another whose name is unknown; and one other man (age 20-30). William, Andrew, John, and possibly Richard, Jr. could all fit these characteristics.

In the Richard Worth household, it is much more difficult to assign names to the check marks. The household consisted of Richard (age 50 to 60); Elizabeth (age 54); two females (age 10 to 15), one of whom should have been Elizabeth (Jr.); another female (age 15 to 20); and three males (age 30 to 40). This last figure seems suspect. It is, after all, an unlikely distribution of ages in any family. It does seem more reasonable to assume that William C. Scott, the census-taker, making an entry on the 29th line of a long page of figures, simply miscalculated by one column and that the correct entry should read, "Males age 20-30, 3." This interpretation would come much closer to fitting the actual ages of the Worth family members known to have been in the area at the time.

The most useful single piece of information we uncovered in our research was found in the record books of the First Baptist Church. Richard Worth, Sr. died in June, 1845. Obviously then, the Richard Worth who filed a claim against John's estate for last sickness, funeral, and coffin expenses on August 19, 1845 and who, in 1858, told the particulars of Johnny's

death to the Reverend Thomas McGaw was Richard, Jr.

. . . . .

If we are to make some definite statement pin-pointing the death and burial sites of John Chapman, we must base that statement on evidence of the highest possible quality. In evaluating any piece of evidence, we must consider three factors: opportunity, motive, and consistency. Did the informant have close, personal access to the information? Did he stand to receive any personal gain from his testimony? Does the evidence given remain consistent with itself and with other facts which can be documented independently?

None of the testimonies usually quoted is totally consistent with the known facts in every detail. Nevertheless, the best evidence available would appear to be the statement which Richard Worth, Jr. made in 1858 in Butler, Indiana, then called Norristown. Richard was interviewed by his friend Thomas N. McGaw on behalf of Reverend James F. M'Gaw who was writing a novel in which Johnny Appleseed was to play a minor role. The Rev. M'Gaw elaborated upon and greatly romanticized the details furnished to him and, indeed, almost singlehandedly invented the myth of Johnny's tender, touching deathbed scene. The original letter from James McGaw was published in the Mansfield Ohio Liberal in August, 1873. Other testimonies commonly referred to are John W. Dawson's letter to the Fort Wayne Sentinel published in 1871; several letters written by John H. Archer, grandson of David Archer who owned the Archer graveyard, which were published at various times around 1900; and the oral and written testimonies of a number of Wesley Roebuck's informants, recorded in the period from 1920 to 1942. All other accounts

of John's death and burial appear to be derived from one or more of the above.

McGaw's report of Richard Worth's statement in 1858 contains versions of several common Appleseed stories plus one or two for which it seems to be the original source. In only one short paragraph does McGaw quote Richard Worth directly but that paragraph directly addresses both questions of where Johnny died and where he was buried. McGaw wrote, "'We buried him,' said Mr. Worth, 'respectably in David Archer's graveyard, two and one half miles north of Fort Wayne, he having died at my father's house, which to him was a comfortable and welcome home in his old age.'"

In chronological order, the second-earliest evidence is contained in the Dawson letter of October, 1871. Dawson wrote his letter in response to an article about Johnny Appleseed in Harper's New Monthly Magazine. Dawson corrected factual errors in the Harper's account, related several stories of John's activities in and around Fort Wayne, and stated, "Johnny Appleseed died on the 11th of March, 1845, at the house of William Worth, in St. Joseph Township, Allen County, Indiana, on the land now owned by Jesse Cole, on the Feeder Canal. He was buried a reasonable time thereafter in a beautiful natural mound at the family burying ground set apart by David Archer."

Around 1900, when interest in Johnny Appleseed began to be rekindled, John H. Archer wrote several letters to various persons and newspapers setting forth his recollections of John. His statement most often quoted was included in a letter written to the Fort Wayne Journal-Gazette on March 22, 1903. He wrote, "He died 57 years ago at the home of David and William Worth a few rods northeast of the present home of Edward Pfeiffer, on the Leo Road, three miles north of Fort Wayne, and was laid to rest in



Stone markers erected by W. S. Roebuck to mark the supposed locations of the Richard Worth cabin (top) and Johnny Appleseed's cabin (bottom).



grandfather's private burying grounds."

The most recent testimonies are those solicited by Wesley Roebuck. These were based on stories handed down among some of the early families of St. Joseph Township, some of which had been filtered through three generations before Roebuck recorded them. Roebuck was able to locate some informants who were alive at the time Johnny was buried and who claimed to have attended the funeral or visited the gravesite. The various testimonies elicited by Roebuck differed somewhat, as might be expected, but did enable Roebuck to locate the remains of a cabin and an apparent burying place at the sites indicated by some of the informants.

In evaluating the testimonies, it is easiest to dispose of the Roebuck evidence. It cannot be proved that any of the Roebuck witnesses was present at the death or burial; in fact, Roebuck's principal witness, Eben Miles Chapman who even claimed to be a grand-nephew of Johnny, was not related to John at all. But much more damaging was the internal inconsistency of the Roebuck evidence. Early in his investigations, Roebuck attempted to show that John died at the home of a Hiram Worth. When this proved impossible, he fixed on the name Levi Worth and finally, as more facts became clear, settled on Richard. Roebuck showed a certain enthusiastic but uncritical acceptance of evidence and there is evidence to show that Roebuck, or his researchers, would, on occasion, change or alter evidence to improve its coincidence with their theories. The best that can be said for the Roebuck investigation is that it uncovered a few really important documentable facts;\* it provided the

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\* Roebuck and his researchers should be credited with discovering the Chapman estate papers, the

impetus for a general investigation which brought to light a good many more documentable facts; and it probably located within some fairly exact boundaries, the cabin in which Richard Worth, Sr. was living at the time of the 1840 census.

John Archer's testimony is more difficult to evaluate. He was wrong about the date of John's death; but so was every other witness, bar none. The striking features of his testimony are the precise location of the "home of David and William Worth" and his insistence that John was buried in the Archer graveyard. If John Archer's testimony can be faulted, it would have to be on grounds of his access to the events. Archer was only eight years old when Johnny died. He did not set down his recollections until fifty-six years later and he may have been influenced somewhat by other stories and memories in the meantime.

John Dawson's testimony is the most comprehensive and the most widely quoted. It is also easily the most confusing and the most prone to error. Dawson had obviously done some research, talked to Samuel Fletter, and checked the Chapman estate papers. His research must have been hurried; his letter appeared in the Fort Wayne Sentinel on October 21 and 23 in response to an article in the November issue of Harper's. Throughout his account, Dawson includes many minute details which make his testimony believable; but his work is slipshod, with inexplicable mistakes amongst the most useful materials. For instance, Dawson gives us our most detailed location for Johnny's often-mentioned but

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purchase of land by John and Andrew Worth, and with recording much of the local traditions of St. Joseph Township.

never -documented nursery on the St. Joseph River, the nursery he was supposedly hurrying to save when he was overcome by his fatal illness. Dawson located the nursery "at the northwest corner of the land of David Archer on the St. Joseph Road." The location noted would have been on the Leo Road. The St. Joseph Road ran east of the river, past Richard Worth's house. Similarly Dawson misreported the date of death as March 11, 1845 with such authority that it was sixty years before the true date was discovered. For many of his details and personal recollections, Dawson is the only authority, but some of his accounts have since been independently documented. Dawson himself was a local historian and newspaper publisher and was seriously trying to determine the facts about Johnny Appleseed. Dawson claimed for himself no special knowledge about John's death; indeed he specifically credited Samuel Fletter as the source of much of the information he reported.

The testimony of Richard Worth, Jr., as reported by James McGaw, is the least complete of the four; yet it contains seven words, mentioned only in passing, which give the strongest possible evidence for its authenticity. Throughout much of the McGaw letter, it is impossible to determine exactly which details Richard related to McGaw and which are the results of the "much inquiry" to which McGaw alluded in his introductory paragraph. In the passage relating to John's burial however, McGaw quoted Richard Worth directly and it is this direct quote, recorded only thirteen years after the event, that forms the basis for our conclusions about the sites of John's death and burial. Richard Worth stated that John was buried in the Archer graveyard and then added, "he having died at my father's house." Worth might have forgotten many of the details in thirteen years; he, like every other witness, might have misremembered

the date; but it does not seem likely that he would have forgotten the name of the member of his own family in whose house Johnny Appleseed died.

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Having considered all of the preceding evidence, we can state in conclusion that John Chapman, Johnny Appleseed, died at the home of Richard Worth, Senior and that he was buried somewhere in the Archer burial ground.

We voice this conclusion fully realizing the fact, indeed we wish specifically to point out that, while there exists no definite proof as yet, the preponderance of the evidence and the only documentary evidence available indicates that Richard Worth, Sr. lived on the east bank of the St. Joseph River, on or near the land which later became the Roebuck farm.















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